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ABSTRACT

The history of the basic course in speech communication in college shows that it has maintained a continued emphasis on public speaking and that change has been slow. A review of the literature revealed that the course has been typically viewed as a public speaking course taught in self-contained sections with one instructor responsible for teaching 20-25 students. While theoretical rifts abound, major deviations from the predominance of public speaking are found in isolated situations only. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the emphasis did not change; however, a significant change has taken place in the basic course as a result of pragmatic issues. Economics, in particular, have encouraged the use of more graduate assistants and have forced departments to look for ways to increase enrollments without sacrificing quality. In the 1980s experimentation was done with a new teaching technique called Personalized System of Instruction (PSI)--a format which uses large groups of students (often 70 or more) with one instructor. Continued experimentation with new formats for instruction and research into optimal learning of communication skills appear to be called for. (Thirty-seven references are attached.) (KEH)

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The Basic Course in Speech Communication: An Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to trace some of the changes that have taken place in the basic course in speech communication through the use of representative literature concerning the basic course. In addition, a direction for the future, indicated by the literature, will be suggested. This paper should serve as both an historical perspective of this course and a summary of the changes that may have occurred as this course has responded to philosophical/intellectual and/or economic/pragmatic pressures.

The Basic Course in Speech Communication: An Historical Perspective

"Nothing endures but change" (Bartlett 1968, 77). Heraclitus' words spoken over 2,000 years ago have a certain undeniable truth for us today. Our advanced technologies have brought the nations of the world into closer proximity and opened up new worlds to explore, thus necessitating rapid and complex changes in people in order to adapt. We no longer have to wait for a generation to pass by for a "gap" to occur; people only a few years apart in age have trouble understanding jargon, pop music references, etc.

Coping with the need to adapt is a challenge that faces all aspects of society, but perhaps most notably in the field of education. If our broad goal in education is to prepare people to function effectively in their world, then education must reflect the demands to be faced in that world.

Nowhere do the implications of change weigh heavier in higher education than in the field of speech communication. As society changes, so does the need to adapt our personal communication skills in order to adjust. In 1977, Wallace Bacon, then President of the Speech Communication Association, stated:

> I believe that we are central to the aims of higher education, today even more than in the past. While I trust that instruction in subject matter will remain the domain of colleges and universities, it seems clear enough that we are no longer training scholars largely to talk to other scholars. Institutions are facing the task of teaching men and women to interact with others in the day-to-day world outside their walls. (10)

A variety of communication skills seem to be impacted by societal changes. Increased mobility has lessened our ability to rely on childhood friends to provide an interpersonal support structure for later life. Changing roles in male/female interactions have made reliance on childhood norms and expectations unworkable. Therefore, interpersonal competence increasingly is becoming a skill that is essential to our social and career well-being. With increased technological expertise, information is easily obtained in little time. The need to "have" information is being replaced by the need to use and present that information well. Public speaking skills may take on a role of greater importance in such a society. The small businessperson is often being replaced by large corporate structures and with this change brings the desirability of personnel who can function effectively in group settings.

Therefore, interpersonal, public speaking and small group competence increasingly are becoming critical skills to have.

As our way of life has changed, so has the field of speech communication. The course offerings at colleges and universities have grown from courses in voice and diction and public speaking to a vast array of courses in communication and law, the rhetoric of advertising and freedom of speech, to name but a few. The national organization has expanded from a group of seventeen discontented members of the National Council of Teachers of English (Bryant 1971) to a thriving organization of thousands with eleven major divisions and twenty-five commissions, sections, caucuses, and committees serving the diverse interests of the members, as outlined in Spectra, the newsletter of the national organization in speech communication (1988).

Even the name of this organization has undergone dramatic changes from The National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking to The National Association of Academic Teachers of Speech to The Speech Association of America (Jeffrey 1964) and finally to The Speech Communication Association, as the organization's members sought to reevaluate their role in today's world. This reevaluation continues as this paper is written. The January 1989 Spectra contains a plea from Michael Osborne, the outgoing president of the organization, to change the name to the American Communication Association. The current recommendation seems to imply a current move away from the "speech" label to the more encompassing stress on communication in general. These name changes show one way our discipline as a whole has struggled to meet the needs of a changing world.

It would be reasonable to expect that the basic course in speech communication at colleges and universities also has undergone major changes. Since the basic course is defined as "that course either required or recommended for a significant number of undergraduates or that course which the department has or would recommend as a requirement for all or most undergraduates" (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes 1980, 1), then the basic course becomes a focal point for any speech communication department. Hargis (1956) states the following:

> in numbers of students and faculty involved, the beginning course outweighs all others. It is the only class in speech which a majority of students elect, and hence offers them their sole opportunity for speech training. Here the student receives indoctrination with a basic philosophy of oral communication, the impression of which persists whether or not he undertakes further study. It is generally on

> the basis of this one course that members of other departments of a college or university judge the value of speech in the college curriculum. And, for those of us who teach speech, it is significant as the foundation for advanced work in the department. (26)

White, Minnick, Van Dusen, and Lewis (1954) echo similar thoughts: "Since most students enroll only for this first course, to a considerable extent it is here that we earn prestige for our discipline and respect for ourselves as valuable members of the teaching community" (163).

All of this information leads to the conclusion that changes in the world and in the discipline of speech communication should be reflected in the basic speech communication course. This course is highly valuable to the students and to the speech communication profession and so it needs to be kept current with societal needs and expectations. The purpose of this paper is to trace some of the changes that have taken place in the basic course in speech communication through the use of representative literature concerning the basic course. In addition, a direction for the future, indicated by the literature, will be suggested. This paper should serve as both an historical perspective of this course and a summary of the changes that may have occurred as this course has responded to societal and/or disciplinary changes. Further importance of this inquiry was stated by Gibson, Hanna, and Huddleston (1985): "What is occurring in the basic course appears to be a reflection of the thinking, generally, of teachers and scholars in ... our discipline. So, to trace the history of course orientations is, to some extent, to trace the history of thought in our discipline" (283).

Focus of Early Research

Concern with the basic course has persisted throughout the history of our discipline. White et al. (1954) reminds us that consideration of the objectives and nature of the first course in speech "antedates the formation in November, 1914, of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, and since that time it has been a perennial subject for articles in our journals and papers at regional and national meetings" (163).

What should be the content emphasis of the basic speech course? How should the basic speech course be taught? These two basic questions were pondered by the earliest of researchers and many factors influenced the answers they reached. However, two factors stand out as noteworthy: differing philosophies and economic pressures.

Differing Philosophies

In 1954, White edited a symposium presenting three professionals in the field, Lewis, Minnick and Van Dusen, and their approaches to the content emphasis of the first speech course (White et al. 1954). All three claimed two basic premises in common: The first speech course that students take is likely to be the only speech course they ever take and therefore the first speech course should aim at the basic needs of students. This, however, is where the agreement ended.

Lewis took the broadest design: the communications approach[1]. He felt that since "this first course will be, for most students, the last course as well, it seems reasonable that it should drive towards the most pressing need of all students" (167). For Lewis, this "pressing need" indicated an eclectic philosophy. He stressed four characteristics of his approach:

> (1) the students will be given many opportunities to practice, (2) the emphasis will be upon content rather than form, upon clarity rather than artistry, (3) training will be given in listening as well as in speaking and reading, and (4) training will be offered in several of the types of oral communication. (168)

Minnick rebelled against such a broad scope for the basic course. He claimed the following:

> Some educators have high hopes for the first speech course. They expect it to do many things - teach students to listen critically, to act naturally and purposefully, to speak with cultured, animated voices, to read aloud with a strong sense of communicativeness, to discover and evaluate evidence, to reason correctly, to organize speech materials with unity, coherence, and emphasis, and, not content with these, they expect to attain a number of additional goals which I have no space to enumerate. All of these are laudable aims, without doubt, and if they were attained, we should have no need for other courses in the speech curriculum. But I am afraid that in our efforts to do much we often succeed merely in doing little. (164)

For Minnick, the "pressing need" steered him toward a very specific design: the public speaking approach. Minnick stated that too often "we forget that the foremost requirement for effective participation in a democratic society is persuasive speaking in public" (165). This strong belief

translated to a first speech course that "is dedicated to the purpose of training young people to speak the truth honestly and to speak it well" (165). Minnick even offered a clear example to support his philosophy. If his arguments failed to be convincing then the need for more skillful and persuasive public speakers was supported all the more strongly!

Van Dusen argued for the third design: the voice and diction approach. Basing his feelings on testing of entering freshmen and transfer students, Van Dusen stated:

> Because of the large number of persons whose voice and/or diction required improvement each year, I have come to believe that these two factors should receive attention before the student enters upon subjects which stress platform appearances. (166)

Van Dusen saw that 25.5% of his school's population needed training in voice and diction and so perceived this as the "pressing need." He advocated separate courses in voice training and diction so the students could elect to take a course based on their individual needs. Van Dusen felt that training in voice and diction was "fundamental" for students interested in drama and radio-television and such training allowed all students to proceed to further speech courses with greater confidence. On the whole, "it seems advisable that such help should be offered early so as to give students the basis for good speech in all situations" (167).

The disparity in approaches presented here is wide, with each claiming to be the "fundamental" approach. From this early research, it seems apparent that much diversity of opinion existed concerning the content emphasis of the basic course.

Economic Pressures

Another factor that influenced the basic course was economic pressures. Change in the basic course seemed inevitable, not only because society was changing, but because economic influences threatened to affect the basic course, as well as all of education. It seems commonplace today for us to feel pressured by spiraling costs and subsequent economic cutbacks in education, but it is interesting to note that these problems have been with us for a number of years. Earl James McGrath (1953), then U. S. Commissioner of Education, railed against the forces that he felt spelled disaster for our schools. "I write of the 'coming breakdown' in the hope that an awakened citizenry will act to make my prophecy invalid; but I write in the certainty that unless corrective action is taken, there will be a breakdown in our public schools

in the immediate future" (27).

White shared McGrath's viewpoint. Focusing on the college level, White (1953) saw an educational program that was "a somewhat untidy medley of packed lecture halls, I.B.M.-corrected examinations, capsule curricula, and of emphasis upon rote rather than upon thinking" (247). Both men saw as the root of these evils a lack of financial support.

The deterioration in the quality of education depicted by McGrath and White and the influence of finances on this breakdown was not, or should not have been, a surprise. The surprise comes in the year these observations were made: 1953.

Overall, this literature suggests two assumptions about the basic course: 1) the differing philosophies espoused by Lewis, Minnick and Van Dusen indicate a lack of consensus about what should be emphasized in the basic course and so a wide variety of content emphases would be expected throughout the country and 2) widespread change in the world and in the field of communication, coupled with increasing economic pressures, would force the basic course to respond by changing considerably in terms of instructional format, also. Surprisingly, a closer look at the basic course in speech communication from the 1950s to date does not show clear support for these assumptions. Specifically, literature was analyzed for information concerning two areas: the content emphasis and the instructional characteristics. In the content emphasis, the primary topic or topics covered in class were discerned. In the instructional characteristics, such things as the class size, the ranks of the teachers instructing sections of the course, the credits earned for taking the course, whether or not the course was required for graduation and the format of the course (self-contained with one instructor per small group, lecture-recitation with a mass lecture and smaller lab groups, etc.) were analyzed.

The State of the Basic Course

No studies detailing the state of the basic course were published prior to 1956. At that time, a study begun in 1954 appeared in the literature.

> As its project for 1954 the Committee on Problems in Undergraduate Study of the Speech Association of America ventured to answer the question, "What is the first course in speech?" This was not an attempt to determine what it should be ideally, but, rather, to discover what the course is as now taught (Hargis 1956, 26).

Hargis, the chairperson, reported the results of a questionnaire sent to 440 chairpersons, of whom 229 responded. The results painted the content emphasis of the basic course in speech as a course "usually in the area of public speaking, with an occasional variant offering such as fundamentals or voice" (32). While units in debate, radio, speech science, acting and others were sometimes included, students "work on certain non-public speaking units apparently, not for their own sakes, but as a means of developing public speaking skills" (32). In instruction, 71% of the respondents stressed practice over theory. Since over 74% of the class time was spent in practice activities, the course was basically a skills course.

The instructional characteristics depicted the basic course as typically a single semester course worth three units of credit. It "serves both as a terminal course and as preparation for advanced work; for the majority it is a prerequisite to all other offerings in the department" (31). It was planned for all students and was required for graduation in 42% of the colleges and universities surveyed. The class size ranged from ten to forty students with the average class containing 21.7 students (27-28). The percentages of instructors at various ranks was not reported. In addition, the preferred instructional format (self-contained, mass lecture, etc.) was not noted, although references to how class time was spent seems to indicate self-contained class sections as the typical format.

In 1958, Hostettler researched the area of teaching methods in speech communication. While this study did not focus exclusively on the basic course, the basic course was included and the information gathered has much application for the basic course. Since this survey/analysis is one of the few which deals with instructional formats, it will be reported in detail. Hostettler surveyed approximately 250 institutions while serving on the Interest Group on Administrative Policies and Practices of the Speech Association of America. Hostettler's goal was to ascertain, from the 118 replies, "what new teaching procedures may already be in use or are planned" (99). He believed that change was desperately called for and that the hope of the discipline was "in the discovery of new teaching methods--methods which not only will enable experienced staff members to reach more students, but will not debase academic standards" (99).

Despite this strong foreboding, only 53% of the respondents "reported they were planning for, experimenting with, or had already established new teaching methods" (100). The word "new," however, was misleading since "the survey failed to uncover many ideas that can be termed 'radical'

or that represented marked departures from procedures already accepted in academic circles" (100). A few departments planned to increase section size grudgingly, but few reported an increase greater than from 20 to 25 students in a section. Ohio State was the only institution that reported experimenting with large class sizes, most notably up to 70 in a performance course. Hostettler expressed disdain for such a change. "Such numbers, of course, challenge traditional standards for competent instruction in speech skills. Careful and continued testing will be necessary before such class sizes will be accepted by the profession generally" (101).

Actually, the teaching methods reported almost all had major flaws in Hostettler's analysis. Graduate student use was growing, especially, the use of candidates for the Master's degree. Hostettler stated that the "relative inexperience of these new teachers may well result in lowered calibre of instruction" (101). Likewise, the use of undergraduate majors to grade some speeches was deemed "a plan which would bring our academic standing under serious and justified criticism" (102). Taping speeches outside of class was suggested, but Hostettler cited an increase in faculty time outside of class and the lack of a real audience as major arguments against such an alternative. Equally unappealing were ideas presented that would restrict enrollment in basic speech courses to students with speech defects and other problems and plans that called for delivering speeches to outside community groups. Hostettler saw some merit in letting better students go on to advanced courses and reexamining the amount and frequency of offerings at the advanced level so that "experienced teachers can take on more sections of basic courses" (102). Closed-circuit television was cited for use, but Hostettler warned that this "method may be useful for lecture courses, but it is difficult to see how television, since it is more expensive, can provide any essential advantage when compared with the lecture-recitation method" (102).

This latter method, the lecture-recitation method, was the only one Hostettler did see as a possibility for the future. This method would allow for a large lecture group of about 100 students taught by one instructor and meeting one hour per week, with the other two hours of weekly meeting times using a recitation format of about 25 in a group. While not actually stated by Hostettler, other literature suggests that the norm at this time was a classroom of about 25 students that met three hours a week with one instructor (see Hargis 1956; White, Minnick, Van Dusen, and Lewis 1954). This change to the lecture-recitation method would reduce the instruction time by 25% (Hostettler 1958, 101). When coupled with the use of graduate students leading the small recitation

groups, Hostettler felt that the "lecture-recitation procedure may well prove to be the best solution of our impending difficulties, permitting us to handle more students without seriously lowering academic standards" (102).

While many of Hostettler's ideas about the use of graduate students, the inappropriate use of undergraduate students, etc. may seem dogmatic and uncompromising, for the 1950s these views were somewhat enlightened. Of particular note is the fact that Hostettler called for changes that would be cost-effective and called for careful and continued testing of any changes in class size; these are issues that still are being addressed today.

As represented through the research reviewed, the literature of the 1950s depicted the content of the typical basic course in speech communication as predominantly a course in public speaking. This was the content approach advocated by Minnick. Lewis' broad-based communications approach to the basic course content was far less prevalent and Van Dusen's appeal for voice and diction was used infrequently (Hargis 1956). The instructional characteristics that dominated were common ones in education: sections of approximately 20-25 students met with one instructor for three hours per week (apparently on the semester system) for three credits worth of study. The argument for the lecture-recitation effectiveness made by Hostettler did not seem to have permeated the field yet. However, Hostettler may have set a goal for the future.

The 1960s brought new searches into the content and instructional characteristics of the basic course. However, little seemed to have changed. In 1963, Dedmon and Frandsen (1964) surveyed 925 departments of speech. Four-hundred and six replies showed that, content-wise, a "course in public speaking is by far the most frequently required first course in speech in colleges and universities in the United States" (37). In the realm of instructional characteristics, the researchers noted that a first course in speech was required in more than half of the responding schools. Class size, instructional ranks of teachers, instructional format and credit value were not reported.

London's survey of 670 institutions in 1963 yielded 495 responses. Though this survey revealed that the title Fundamentals of Speech was favored over Public Speaking by more than three to one, the content area included most often, in fact by 93.46% of the schools, was extemporaneous speaking. It received major emphasis in the first course in speech in 78.81% of the schools, a figure that was more than three times as large as any other single content area (29-30).

In terms of instructional characteristics, London reported that the basic course was usually a one-semester-long course worth three credits that met three hours a week. The class size was usually twenty students with the larger schools preferring class sizes of twenty-five. The course was required for graduation in one-third of the schools, was required for most degree candidates in one-sixth of the schools, and was required for some degree candidates in another one-third of the schools (29). The ranks of teachers and the instructional format preferred were not noted.

In 1967, the Undergraduate Speech Instruction Interest Group of the Speech Association of America charged a group of researchers to discover the status of the basic course (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie 1970, 13). Gibson, Gruner, Brooks and Petrie contacted 887 schools in 1968 and 564 colleges and universities replied. Their inquiry revealed that little had changed in the basic course. Although the titles of the basic course seemed to indicate a trend away from public speaking to a communications approach in the content emphasis, the evidence once again led "one to suspect that whatever the declared emphasis or title of the basic course, the course content centers around public speaking" (15). In the area of instructional characteristics, the course was usually a three-credit course taught for three hours per week for one semester. The class size remained at about 17 to 22 students, resisting the "move toward large sections so common in the basic courses of other disciplines" (17). The basic course was required for graduation in 40% of the schools responding. An increasing number of graduate students was being used to teach the basic course, although actual numbers of teachers at various ranks were not reported. While not stated directly, the assignments noted seemed to indicate a self-contained format as being the preferred method.

As represented through the research reviewed, the literature of the 1960s reflected little of the change taking place in the world and the speech communication discipline. The radical changes in technology (as illustrated by the moon landing) and the social upheaval taking place (as on college campuses after the military incident at Kent State) would seem to necessitate an effect on a field like communication. However, the summary of the 1950s would be just as true for the summary of the 1960s. As cited earlier in this paper, the course was:

> predominantly a course in public speaking. This was the content approach advocated by Minnick. Lewis' broad-based communications approach to the basic course content was far less prevalent and Van Dusen's appeal for voice and diction was used infrequently....The instructional characteristics that

> dominated were common ones in education: sections of approximately 20-25 students met with one instructor for three hours per week (apparently on the semester system) for three credits worth of study. The argument for the lecture-recitation effectiveness made by Hostettler did not seem to have permeated the field yet.

The only change came with the stated emphasis of the course shifting toward a communications approach. However, as was noted earlier, this seemed to be a shift in name only since public speaking continued to dominate the emphasized units of instruction.

The 1970s brought further examination and reexamination of the basic course in speech communication. Once again, little seemed to have changed. In 1974, Gibson, Kline and Gruner did a follow-up to the 1968 survey by Gibson, Gruner, Brooks and Petrie. In this second survey, 1291 questionnaires were sent and 554 usable ones were returned. The content emphasis of the basic course seemed to show "a reduction in courses emphasizing public speaking, fundamentals, and voice and articulation and an increase in courses emphasizing other aspects of communication and a multiple approach. However, the result may be more of a change in name than one in course content" (207-208) since a large amount of class time was still devoted to public speaking presentations. Of the schools responding, 71% required from 4-10 speeches and 21% required 1-4 speeches.

In the area of instructional characteristics, the typical basic course was still offered to all undergraduates, was worth three credits of study and was taught by one instructor with a class size of about 18-22 or slightly higher. Instruction was given by teachers at all ranks and the "charge that the basic course is taught exclusively by junior staff members is not supported by this study" (211). However, the study did show that graduate assistants perform the bulk of the teaching in 17% of the schools, instructors in 40%, assistant professors in 54%, associate professors in 33% and full professors in 21%. Acknowledging that these numbers do not add up to 100%, indicating, to the researchers, that "several schools reported faculty members of more than one rank working in the basic course" (211), the results show a clear preponderance of the instruction weighted toward the graduate assistants and junior faculty. Enrollments were stable or increasing, with increases keeping pace with the growth rates of the institutions.

The third in this series of surveys initiated by the Speech Association of America was begun in 1979 by Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe and Hayes (1980). The researchers obtained 552 usable responses

from the 2,794 questionnaires sent out. Few changes were noted. The instructional characteristics showed that the typical basic course was a three-credit-hour course offered to undergraduates. Classes typically were taught in individual sections of 13-30 students by one instructor, with the 18-30 size being the most used. The instructors, however, were drawn more heavily from graduate assistants and junior faculty than was noted in the second survey. Only 14% of the teaching was done by associate professors and 10% by full professors (5). Enrollments were keeping pace with or excelled the growth rate of the institutions. The small, self-contained classes were used in 86% of the schools responding.

The content emphasis of the basic course did, at last, seem to change. "Since the last study, there has been a clear and pronounced shift toward the performance orientation" (9). Public speaking "once again" was the dominant emphasis according to these researchers. However, it must be restated that the apparent move away from performance indicated in the previous study was felt to be inaccurate. In the 1974 study, 21% of the schools required from one to three speeches per student per term, and 71% required from four to ten. In the 1979 survey, 12% required from one to three performance assignments, and 80% from four to ten performances" (3). While an increase reaffirms the traditionally strong thrust towards performance, it hardly shows a major change from the 1974 survey.

In actuality, then, as represented through the research reviewed, the literature of the 1970s showed the basic course as having no substantive changes. The communications approach gained slightly as an approach taken, but it posed no real threat to the solid performance orientation that had been the norm for so long. Voice and diction was losing ground; in fact, it had been dropped as a possible response in the latest survey (2). More junior faculty and graduate students were involved and some courses seemed to utilize larger class sizes, yet these changes did not seem to be major changes adopted by a majority of schools. Again, the summary of the 1950s and the 1960s could be repeated as an accurate summary of the 1970s.

In the 1980s, some experimentation was done into a new teaching technique for the field of speech communication. This research relied on Fred S. Keller's Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) which was first introduced into the field of psychology in 1963. The format was very different from the small, self-contained classrooms which dominated the field of speech communication and even from the lecture-recitation method advocated by Hostettler. This format utilized large groups of students (often 70 or more) with one instructor. The use of self-pacing,

mastery learning, an emphasis on written materials, lectures as motivational rather than to supply new information, and the use of student proctors held promise for the field of speech communication. The cost-effectiveness was easy to see and was appealing as a possible remedy for financial crunches. However, the adaptation of this system to speech communication courses with a performance orientation took time and experimentation. (For more information concerning the PSI model, see Keller,1974; Keller and Sherman 1974, 1982.)

While early experimentation with this model in our field began in the 1970s (see Scott and Young 1976), it was the 1980s when numerous researchers tried to adapt this model for performance courses (see Berryman-Fink and Pederson,1981; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Yerby 1982; Fuss-Reineck and Seiler 1982; Gray 1984; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Thomas 1988; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Yerby 1986; Hanisko, Beall, Prentice, and Seiler 1982; Hanna and Gibson 1983; Seiler 1982, 1983; Seiler and Fuss-Reineck 1986; Staton-Spicer and Bassett 1980; and Taylor 1986). The research was encouraging. The courses based on the new format were shown to be cost- and time-effective and the students appeared to learn as well as, or better than, students in other formats of the basic course (Gray 1984; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Thomas 1988; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Yerby 1986; Seiler 1982, 1983). However, as Fuss-Reineck and Seiler stated: "To our knowledge, PSI has had little acceptance in speech communication" (1982, 1). Therefore, this potentially significant change did not have much impact on the vast majority of basic courses in speech communication across the nation.

The 1980s also brought the fourth and latest investigation of the basic course sponsored by the Speech Communication Association (SCA) which was conducted in 1983 by Gibson, Hanna and Huddleston (1985). Questionnaires were mailed to the total SCA mailing list of junior, community, and senior colleges and graduate institutions in the United States. Of the 2,078 questionnaires mailed, 552 usable questionnaires were returned. The start of this decade's research in the basic course did not show many surprises or changes. The instructional characteristics showed that the typical basic course was still an undergraduate course worth three credits of college work. The typical class size ranged from 18-30 students, once again confirming "the finding in each of these investigations that 'small class size' in the basic course appears to be crucial to the individuality of instruction and its interactive nature" (282). Responses seemed to indicate a continued use of self-contained classes. The promises of the PSI model did not seem to have much of an effect on the national instructional format of choice.

Instruction in the basic course was still weighted toward the newer teachers: graduate assistants (18%), instructors (30%), assistant professors (23%), associate professors (18%), and professors (11%). "On the basis of this investigation more than two thirds of the instruction in this departmental offering is provided by junior faculty members or graduate teaching assistants" (289). In a majority of schools (62%), the basic course is expanding at about the same rate as institutional growth and expansion of the basic course is exceeding overall department growth in 30% of the schools. The major emphases of the course content continued to shift (if, indeed, we ever really turned away) in the direction of public speaking: 54% reported a public speaking orientation compared with 34% who reported a combination of public speaking, interpersonal communication and small group discussion. As noted by the authors, "the percentage of schools taking a Public Speaking approach in their basic course is essentially similar to the status of the basic course when this study was first conducted in 1968" (284).

What can be said of the state of the basic course in the 1980s? The strongest content emphasis was public speaking. In the area of instructional characteristics, class sizes stayed relatively small (18-30), junior faculty and graduate assistants formed the largest core of instructors, and the typical course was a three-credit course using a self-contained format. As represented through the research reviewed, the repetition, once again, of the summary of the 1950s would be quite accurate for the 1980s.

Neither the diversity of content emphases nor the widespread modernizing changes in instructional format expected to be found was uncovered through the literature from the 1950s through the mid-1980s. The following table presented in the Gibson et al. study (1985) shows the comparison of content emphases throughout the four SCA-sponsored investigations of the basic course. It is a vivid example of the lack of change in one significant area: course content. This is especially noticeable if the argument made earlier concerning the lack of any real move away from public speaking in the 1974 study is recalled.

PERCENT OF SCHOOLS REPORTING SPECIFIC ORIENTATIONS TO THE BASIC COURSE

Orientation	1968	1974	1980	1984
Public Speaking	54.5%	21.3%	51.3%	54%
Fundamentals	21.3%	12.8%		
Combination			40.3%	34%
Multiple	13.2%	39.4%		
Comm. Theory			2.5%	4%
Interpersonal			4.7%	6%
Small Group			.5%	2%
Voice & Diction	2.2%	1.3%		

(Gibson et al. 1985, 283.)

Call for Changes in the Basic Course: Intellectual and Pragmatic Reasons

The seeming lack of substantive change gleaned from the literature surveyed raises certain questions. Is the basic course fine as it is? Has the content emphasized in the basic course failed to meet a primary goal of the basic course as stated by Lewis, that of meeting the most pressing need of all students? Have economic pressures caused a breakdown in the basic course, as predicted by White? If these things have not already occurred, will they happen in the near future?

Some researchers would answer "yes" to that last question despite the endurance and growth of the basic course. While little substantive change has taken place, many suggestions and rationales for change have been espoused. In fact, just as the 1950s marked the first detailed studies of the basic course, the 1950s also brought calls for change in the basic course. Hostettler (1958) called for change back in 1958. He believed that the basic course was in trouble, and that was over 30 years ago.

While Hostettler called for change largely because of a perceived shortage of college teachers in the work force, a fear that is not currently an issue, others have called for change for reasons that still plague us today. Basically, they fall into two categories: intellectual and pragmatic (Mehrley and Backes 1972).

Intellectually, there have been two reasons given for change. Though

public speaking continues to be the emphasis of the basic course, there is reason to believe that incorporating more areas of communication would be valuable. Mehrley and Backes (1972) state this view:

> A young colleague seemed startled when he learned from the Gibson survey that most beginning college and university courses in speech were still primarily performance. Speculation ensued about what unique concepts were posited in those classes which were not espoused at the local Toastmasters Club. What variations uttered on those treasured shibboleths "More eye-contact," "Try some gestures," "Seemed to lack poise," and/or "Tighten up the organization a little bit." Pick a text, almost any text, and tiptoe through labyrinthian wastelands of platform movement, the vocalized pause, the proper use of note cards, and the hardy triumvirate of rhetorical musketeers: Logos, Pathos, and their trusty companion, Ethos. In deference to the latter quarter of the twentieth century, students examine, on page sixteen, elaborate communication models, but seventy pages later are told that "the feet should be kept fairly close together while placing either foot slightly ahead of the other." Elocutionists Newton, Holmes, Ward and Lawson are phantasma evoked by syllabi or prefaces which promise "confidence," "power," "prestige," and "admiration from one's classmates." The costs of maintaining the basic course can be formidable, but expense is secondary to the degredation and frustration often suffered by students, faculty and the discipline itself (207).

While those of us who teach public speaking courses and believe in the benefits such courses have to offer may react dubiously to the above statements, Mehrley and Backes (1972) continue with the more popular extension of this argument: "Surely this insistence upon public speaking does much to perpetuate the image the public holds of the discipline. Rather than an emphasis on communication patterns more relevant to contemporary America, for example dyadic and small group interaction, students are still exposed to content and skills in but one highly specialized mode of communication" (207).

Their argument centers on the feeling that if most students are going to have only one exposure to a speech communication course, that course should strive to expose students to at least a few of the skills they will need as communicators in today's world. Increased technologies have brought mass communication into focus, a heightened awareness of gender

needs have made that area one of concern to many educators, applied communication in areas such as health care and the political arena have made interpersonal skills more valued and so on. In many cases, these are the areas where skills in communication may lead to jobs in the coming century. No matter what an educator's preference for what constitutes critical content in the field, with the increasing breadth of application of speech communication skills in our society, it would be easy to believe that no one area, no matter how important, should dominate the basic course if it is to meet the pressing needs of today's students. As stated by Dedmon (1965), "our traditional approaches have blinded us to the real objective of the required first course: to teach a general education course in oral communication" (125).

The other intellectual reason for change centers around the possible lack of intellectual challenge that any course that predominantly teaches one skill may have. Mehrley and Backes (1972) state that the emphasis on public speaking encourages presentation of a body of knowledge that consists primarily of the "norms" of the field. These norms "minimize description to concentrate on prescription, an approach that stems from a particular value system" (209). This encourages students to apply the norms without consideration for the strategy's potential effectiveness in a specific communication situation . The result? "Too many basic courses in speech are intellectual wastelands" (209).

This argument may not elicit agreement from a majority of professionals involved with the basic course. However, certainly the possibility exists that a "how to" approach often dominates an "analysis" approach in reality even if it is not the approach we advocate in theory. The sheer number of performances currently required in the basic course may pose time pressures that increase the likelihood that "doing" outweighs "analyzing;" the 1979 survey cited earlier revealed that 80% of the basic courses required from four to ten performances per term" (Gibson et al. 1980, 3). The better instructors may well avoid this pitfall, but the increased use of minimally-trained graduate students and part-timers may add to the possible validity of the picture posed here by Mehrley and Backes.

Actually, this lack of academic rigor may be a reason presented for why the basic course has not undergone any change. The typical population of the basic course is, after all, freshmen and sophomores. It may be felt that their capabilities are limited and that too many areas of exploration pose a threat to the untrained scholar. However, there is another side to this notion. Baird, Gehring, Kerr, Bosmajian, and White (1967), while advocating a rigorous plan of study, anticipated the argument about the

basic course population. "Are college students in the early undergraduate years, ill-equipped for such basic academic purposes? My only reply is that college training should expect such liberal direction" (13). It would seem cautious to an extreme to avoid changing the direction of a course because of anticipated weaknesses on the part of the student population; the results of any change will give enough data to make a more reliable judgment in this area.

These arguments, then, call for change for intellectual reasons; they point to a perceived need to broaden the scope of units covered in the basic course to keep it effective and current.

In the area of pragmatism, there are also reasons being advocated for change. One such reason grows out of this feeling that the basic course may not be considered challenging enough. Pragmatically, this may have an effect on recruiting potential majors in the field of speech communication. The image of the basic course has significant impact on the image of the discipline in general. "The instructional staff, the department, and the entire discipline are often judged on the basis of this single course. Available data indicates that this judgment is often unfavorable" (Mehrley and Backes 1972, 206). The authors cited research which found that few of the brightest high school students bound for college "commit themselves to a major in speech" (206). While this feeling may be dismissed with the reasonable assumption that most students are entering more highly profitable majors such as business, the study showed a strong intent to major in chemistry, English and history. Even psychology and philosophy "placed far ahead of speech" (206). This study was conducted in 1968; perhaps the image of speech communication to high school students has changed since then. However, Mehrley and Backes felt that, in 1968, high school students avoided coming to college intending to major in speech as a result of a poor image that we present to the world through the basic course. Additionally, they stated that the lack of quality can easily be the result of a course that substantially has not changed since its inception. Since the literature reviewed did not show much substantive change from 1968 to the present, it is possible that this view of speech holds true today.

The next pragmatic issue is that of economics. Currently, the economic pressures predicted by McGrath and White over thirty-five years ago are having an effect on the basic course.

> Few colleges and universities have eluded edicts from legislators, super-boards, regents, presidents, and/or deans which call for the "streamlining of programs," the "generation of respectable FTE's" or the "temporary injunction against any

> new programs or courses." Vacancies caused by retirement go unfilled; nontenured staff are not re-appointed by administrative fiat; salary lines are lost if a faculty member resigns. Horror tales abound of graduate programs eliminated, budgets slashed and even departments abolished or absorbed (Mehrley and Backes 1972, 205).

This statement seems just as true today. In short, programs no longer have the luxury of operating independent of financial considerations. "We are required to be more accountable and responsible for getting optimum educational achievement out of the expenditure of educational funds" (Brooks and Leth 1976, 192).

One last aspect of pragmatism has become an issue: efficient use of faculty teaching time. In a time when "publish or perish" rules the philosophy of academia, any measures that can save instruction time while not sacrificing quality are a true blessing to pressured faculty.

Together, these arguments, then, call for change for pragmatic reasons; they point to a perceived need to keep our image strong and to become time- and cost-effective in the basic course to keep it effective and current.

The Questions Raised Concerning The Changes Reported

These intellectual and pragmatic reasons presented show that there have been calls for change made in our field. The advocation of a basic course which incorporates more of the emphases in the broad field of speech communication and which experiments with instructional formats that are cost- and time-effective has been made over the years. However, the literature reviewed showed little of the changes that could be expected. It seems puzzling to find that "the basic course has changed very little while the discipline as a whole is in the midst of accelerating revision - long held theories and traditional pedagogies are being challenged. The basic course, seemingly quite oblivious of the radical changes in the form and substance of the entire field of speech, continues as it always has" (Mehrley and Backes 1972, 206).

Can this be taken as a sign that the basic course has not changed because it has not needed to change to be effective even in the midst of discipline and societal change? The overwhelming agreement on public speaking as the content to be emphasized and the seldom-changing reliance on a self-contained classroom as the principle teaching method may indicate that the basic course did not need to change in order to be effective. Public speaking may be the kind of skill that remains integral

to our discipline and maintains its importance in the lives of students whether it be the 1950s or 1980s or beyond. Likewise, the notion of a self-contained classroom with one instructor and a group of students small enough to give personal attention to may be a teaching method that remains effective for learning even if it is not cost-effective. Surely this method of teaching has dominated all levels of education for decades, while innovative methods like the open classroom have flourished for a period of time and then been discarded in favor of the more traditional setting. It is, therefore, highly possible that change has not crept into the basic course from the 1950s until the present because the basic course of the 1950s was, and has continued to be, an optimally effective course.

However, there is another side to this issue. Perhaps the fact that the basic course has remained relatively static in the midst of unprecedented change means that the course is no longer relevant to the present yet continues because the discipline itself does not want to tamper with a course so integral to overall departmental health? Maybe universities require public speaking emphases because the people in decision-making positions do not know enough about the field of speech communication to know what else this field has to offer students?

One more potential answer to this concern for little change presents itself. Perhaps the reason there appears to be little change has more to do with the nature of research and publication than anything else. It would be very easy to admit that the state of the basic course articles described had faults. Sometimes labels were hard to figure out (multiple vs. combination vs. fundamentals). Sometimes the context of the information was missing. Although the authors often claim to have a representative sample, they do not allow readers to distinguish what information comes from what source. It would not be surprising to find out, for example, that small schools with only a few sections of the basic course employ small, self-contained sections since no other instructional format would make any sense. Some departments of speech communication have a specific focus (mass communication, broadcasting) and so an emphasis in these departments would be expected to be different than ones sharing broader goals (as departments of speech communication). It also is highly possible that the people conducting the research, sharing the opinions and even answering the surveys are not the people in the position to know/report changes as they take place. A key question may be whether or not the basic course directors publish their innovations. General conversations at conventions lead to the conclusion that most of them do not. Yet these same conversations lead to the belief that many schools do use TV and other forms of media extensively. New texts cover topics like

interviewing and gender communication indicating that schools are asking for such materials. So, the literature available may not represent the state of the basic course accurately. However, the published literature is all that presently is available from which to draw conclusions about the basic course.

Summary and Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, the history of the basic course shows that it has had a continued emphasis on public speaking and it typically has been taught in self-contained sections with one instructor responsible for teaching 20-25 students. Change in the basic course in speech communication has been slow to take place. While theoretical rifts abound, major deviations from the predominance of public speaking are found in isolated situations only. However, it seems that the most significant change that has taken place in the basic course is a result of pragmatic issues. Economics, in particular, have encouraged the use of more graduate assistants and have forced departments to look for ways to increase enrollments without sacrificing quality.

The lack of change may be an artifact of the research available. Certainly, after the review of literature was completed, there was a sense of questioning as to just what we know from this review. The research is vague and there are many questions yet unanswered. Are we still meeting the "pressing needs" of students today? Is the dominance of public speaking representative of the most valuable skills our field has to offer students in a basic course? It is hard to say, then, what the cause for the delay in change has been or even if change is truly needed. The lack of change could be a true difference in philosophies (White et al. 1954). It could be real satisfaction with the basic course as it is now taught (Gibson et al. 1980). It could be resistance to change at any level (Oliver 1962). It could be that economic pressures have not had an impact on every institution. It could even be from a lack of innovative ideas. Sadly, it may be from lack of systematic research in this area. With the importance the basic course holds in most speech communication departments, these questions seem worth pursuing.

The 1990s may be a time of great change for society. Space travel once again has grabbed our attention, opening new frontiers of technological advances and communication challenges. Changing relations with foreign countries have brought possible opportunities for advanced interaction among people of differing cultures. These changes continue to point to a need for a philosophical/intellectual approach that stresses the

need for a variety of communication skills in order to be effective in personal and career roles. In addition, the economic pressures that have had an impact on education will continue to do so. Every day newspapers are filled with stories concerning defeated millages, program cutbacks, pressure by unions and other teacher interest groups to increase salaries and put more money toward programs, etc. However, even in the face of monetary cutbacks, educators are expected to produce better results than ever before. The education system is being analyzed critically and being soundly reprimanded for not providing the quality education taxpayers demand for their children. Higher education is not immune to these trends. This social environment calls for a need for an economic/pragmatic approach that seeks the most cost- and time-effective formats of instruction possible while still maintaining and/or increasing the image of and the overall quality of education in our field. Continued experimentation with new formats of instruction, new units of instruction, etc. should be conducted and, most importantly, published so the field as a whole can benefit from such research. Innovative teaching techniques that meet the increasing communication skills needs of effective society members and that maximize cost- and time-effectiveness in an environment where optimal learning takes place may no longer be just topics for discussion at the conventions and in the journals in speech communication; such changes well may be necessary to keep our basic course strong and, because of its strong connection to our field as a whole, signal the health of the entire discipline of speech communication.

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Notes

[1] The term communication generally is used with regard to the discipline of speech communication while the word communications often is used with regard to message technology. However, even though the term as it is used here refers to the discipline, communications is used in this paper since Lewis used this term originally in his article.

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